

Maine Education Association

Grace Leavitt President | Jesse Hargrove Vice President | Beth French Treasurer
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Testimony

In Support

LD 1526: An Act to Provide Grants to Support Reading Proficiency Programming in Schools Mallory Cook, Director of Training and Early Educator Engagement,

Maine Education Association

Before the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

May 2, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and other esteemed members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

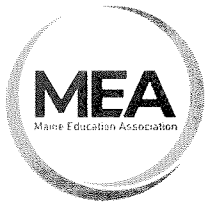
My name is Mallory Cook (pronouns she/her/hers), and I am the Director of Training and Early Educator Engagement at the Maine Education Association, and a certified English teacher and Building Administrator. I am here to provide testimony in support of LD 1526: An Act to Provide Grants to Support Reading Proficiency Programming in Schools.

According to 21-22 data reported on Maine DOE’s ESSA Dashboard¹, 16.2% (13,382) of students are below or well below state expectations in English Language Arts. A breakdown of those numbers shows demographic inequities; the grant funding proposed in this bill would allocate funds to districts, hopefully with support from the Department’s experts to enhance their literacy programming. MEA is hopeful that when establishing criteria, the Department prioritizes districts that have the highest percentage of students below/well below state expectations, especially demographic groups that are disproportionately impacted.

Student Population	Percentage Below/Well Below Expectation in ELA	Number Below/Well Below Expectation in ELA
All Students	16.2	13,382
Students w/ Disabilities	46.2	7,533
Students in Foster Care	37.5	194
Multi-Lingual Learners	49.3	1,163
Black or African American	34.6	1,117

Today you have been presented with data from the Department and literacy leaders in our state that show the growing need for this investment – that literacy is a human right and essential to an individual’s health, success, income, relationships, and involvement in their community. Because the

¹ [ESSA Dashboard | Department of Education \(maine.gov\)](#)



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stakes are so high, we are hopeful these grant funds are built around parameters that do not endorse a single canned curriculum or program. As is evident from today's hearing, literacy is not and will never be simple and settled. Our best tools in delivering effective instruction already exist in our schools – the educators who work with students every day; therefore, these funds should be used to call on the experts in our state to provide cross-curricular training around the most important tenets of literacy: phonetic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and writing.

The DOE's report for LD 138, Resolve, Regarding Reading Proficiency Data Analysis, references a Dyslexia Survey (Flanagan and Will, 2022) that demonstrates that only 33.5% of surveyed teachers felt confident in their reading instruction for students with dyslexia.² The Dyslexia Foundation shows that 15-20% of the population show symptoms of dyslexia. Furthermore, 85% of those who qualify for special services have a disability in reading and language processing.³ For these reasons, it is essential we provide our educators with the on-going professional learning they need to provide students with the support they require. This includes teachers and support staff who work directly with students.

LD 1526 also calls for routine technical rulemaking to govern procedures, criteria, and priorities for awarding grants. The MEA would be happy to share our views and to work alongside the department in the development of those rules.

This is a great opportunity to provide enhanced literacy instruction for many students in our state. We urge the committee to vote ought to pass. Thank you and I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.

² [LD 138 Reading Proficiency Report.pdf](#)

³ [International Dyslexia Association - ...until everyone can read! \(dyslexiaida.org\)](#)